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ABSTRACT

The influence of the German picture magazines and their editors and photographers on publisher Henry Luce and his staff during the early years of "Life" magazine has been overlooked. However, there is strong evidence in the Time, Incorporated, archive files indicating that the year Kurt Korff spent as a consultant to the company's newly reorganized experimental department (1935-36) was extremely beneficial in the development of America's first picture magazine. Korff, a German Jewish immigrant, was just one of the Europeans whose photography training and experience on the German picture magazines provided Time, Incorporated, with a model proposed picture magazine, which encouraged Luce to hire him as a consultant to the prepublication staff, and whose contents were prophetic of the content found in later issues of "Life." Many of the suggestions Korff made concerning which photographers should be hired for "Life," how the photographs should be obtained and laid out, and for what audience the magazine should target its material were followed by the publisher. Korff was a likeable man, according to all reports, but he was unable to give up the style of the German magazines, which "Life" planners had no desire to duplicate. Apparently upset that there were no plans to make him a permanent editor on the new magazine's staff, Korff resigned in July, 1936, to work for the Hearst publishing organization. (HTH)

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History Division

EMIGRÉ CONTRIBUTIONS TO LIFE:

The German Influence in the Development of America's First Picture Magazine

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The difficult time most Americans experienced during the Depression is well documented; however, not everyone suffered during the decade, as evidenced by the thousands of business executives and industrialists who could afford to pay one dollar an issue for Henry Luce's Fortune. By addressing a specialized audience, Fortune was able to capture a significant aspect of the magazine market which had not been tapped before, and Luce was able to increase his bankroll at the same time. Part of Fortune's success was due to the use it made of photographs,¹ a fact which encouraged Luce to consider other magazine projects.

By the time Fortune had been in publication nearly four years, a new Experimental Department was established to determine what project the staff at Time Inc. should channel its energy into next: should it be Time in England, a woman's magazine, a children's magazine, a daily newspaper, an all sports magazine or a picture magazine?² From December 1933 to June 1934, three staff members—John S. Martin (who had been managing editor at Time), Dwight Macdonald, and Natasha von Hoershelman as a researcher—considered the five possible projects, but the picture magazine proposal received the greatest amount of attention. A dozen "dummies" of a picture magazine were produced by the staff; however, Luce placed such strict requirements for a picture magazine to be published by Time Inc. that the project had to be shelved by the middle of 1934.³ Luce had insisted that the magazine be large format so that the photographs would be well displayed; it must be printed by letterpress rather than rotogravure; and it must sell for a dime. Trying to restrict the price to ten cents so that a mass audience

could be reached proved to be difficult since large-format, beautifully-printed magazines of the time, such as Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and Vanity Fair, all sold for thirty-five cents.

A second important problem concerned the time it would take to publish such a magazine, given the printing technology available in 1934. The printers of Time, R.R. Donnelley and Sons of Chicago, could not go to press until two weeks after receiving all the copy and photographs from Luce's staff, a costly delay for a weekly picture magazine that was to be timely.⁴ The printing equipment necessary to produce a magazine of the quality Luce demanded simply had not been developed yet either. The Experimental Department was dissolved in June 1934 and the picture magazine project was abandoned—for the time being.⁵

Over the next few years, there were a variety of factors which influenced Henry Luce's decision to go ahead with his plans for an American picture magazine. An area of influence which largely has been overlooked by historians until now is the manner in which a group of European editors, photographers, and picture editors came to be associated with Time Inc. even before the new magazine began. Of greatest relevance here is the affect on German picture magazine editor—Kurt Korff—had on Life; this paper focuses on the contributions Korff made while employed for a year (1935-36) as a consultant to the newly reorganized Experimental Department. Although this gifted man has largely been forgotten in the past, it should be understood that this European was not the "cause" for America's first picture magazine. Instead, he was part of the "European connection" which was a most important part of a larger puzzle which all came together during the Great Depression.

American Influences

During the time that the first Experimental Department was evaluating the feasibility of publishing a picture magazine, Luce met a young woman who had been an editor for Conde Nast at Vanity Fair and Vogue. In 1931 Clare Boothe Brokaw had suggested to publisher Nast that he start a picture magazine, and she even prepared a dummy to show how that new magazine should look. According to her memo to Nast in May 1931:

...if the Conde Nast publications were to consider buying Life, I can suggest a new editorial formula... I dare to believe would make the magazine a success. I should like to pattern an American magazine—and one bearing the title Life is admirably adapted to its contents—after the Parisian Vu. It would be a weekly, and would contain some of the editorial elements of Time, Fortune, and even Vanity Fair, plus its own special angle, which would be reporting, not all the news nor, necessarily, the most important news, but the most interesting and exciting news, in photographs, and interpreting it editorially through articles by capable writers and journalists.⁶

Although she was unable to convince Nast to undertake this new version of the old Life, which was a failing humor magazine at the time, this memo is strangely prophetic. In light of her interests, it is not suprising that Brokaw wanted to talk to Luce about a new picture magazine when they met at a dinner party in 1934. Luce reportedly told Daniel Longwell after that first encounter that he had met a woman who talked about picture magazines more intelligently than anybody he had ever known before.⁷ When Luce proposed to Brokaw in 1935, he reportedly said, "I don't think Time Inc. wants any new babies, but if you and I get married I will start the picture magazine and you can be co-editor."⁸

During the Luce's two-month honeymoon in Cuba, the picture magazine was the topic of considerable discussion. Ralph Ingersoll went to Cuba to confer with and seek Luce's approval of a sixteen-page picture supplement

for Time that had been prepared by Longwell. Although Luce rejected Longwell's supplement to Time, he did say the idea for a picture magazine should be pursued. Luce said he wanted to see: "Big pictures, beautiful pictures, exciting pictures, pictures from all over the world, pictures of interesting people and lots of babies."⁹ When he returned from his honeymoon, one of the first staff meetings Luce called was devoted to discussing the plans for a new magazine. Luce's assistants opposed the appointment of Clare Boothe Luce as co-editor, and thus quelled her hopes of editing Life, a fact which greatly disappointed the new Mrs. Luce.

Another influential person in the development of Life was Daniel Longwell. About the time the first Experimental Department was abandoned in 1934, Luce hired Longwell away from Doubleday, Doran, and Company to coordinate promotion work for the "March of Time" series and Architectural Forum, which Luce had acquired two years earlier. (Luce had offered Longwell a job on Fortune in 1933, but Longwell turned it down.) At Doubleday, Longwell had edited several picture books and was interested in working for Luce because he hoped to have the opportunity to edit a picture magazine. Having given thought to a new picture magazine for nearly a decade, Longwell later confessed, "It may be treason to say so, but I came to Time Inc. with the definite idea of starting a picture magazine."¹⁰

The March of Time series, headed by Roy Larsen and Louis de Rochemont, was a new and different approach to newsreels. Within a short time after its release in February 1935, the series was quite popular with the American public, proving that there was a market for the pictorial treatment of current events. The editorial productions Longwell and other Time Inc. employees worked on proved to be important training grounds for combining words and pictures, a journalistic method which they went on to perfect

in the pages of Life a few years later.

Longwell's involvement with the March of Time was rather short-lived; in the spring of 1935 he asked to be relieved of his duties and was named the assistant to Time's managing editor John Shaw Billings. As Billings' assistant, Longwell was specifically in charge of introducing more photographs to Time¹¹ and locating photographers who could make significant contributions to Time Inc. One of the first tasks he was assigned in his new position was related to his earlier training: to help edit a seventy-two page picture book celebrating the March of Time series, which was called Four Hours a Year.

The photographers whose work caught the eye of Longwell while he was Billings' special assistant included several Americans who were fascinated by the small cameras being imported from Germany. Although there was a great deal of resistance to the miniature cameras because of their toy-like size and the coarse 35mm film they used, some editors and photographers appreciated the advantages the Leicas and Rolleiflexes (and Ermanoxes, although they didn't use 35mm film) had to offer. Thomas McAvoy, an experienced photographer for the Washington Daily News, used his new Leica to take the first candid shots of President Franklin Deleano Roosevelt. Longwell saw those innovative photographs by McAvoy and published them in a three-page spread in the February 25, 1935 issue of Time. Longwell continued to use McAvoy's pictures in Time, later assigning him to the pre-publication staff of Life, which resulted in McAvoy's being named as one of the four original staff photographers on the new picture magazine.

Another of Longwell's "discoveries" was a young photographer who was using a Leica on assignment for the Oakland (California) Tribune. In the style of Dr. Erich Salomon in Germany, Peter Stackpole used his miniature

camera to catch former President Herbert Hoover napping during another politician's speech in 1935. His photographs of the construction of the Golden Gate and Oakland Bay suspension bridges also interested Longwell, so the twenty-two-year-old photographer received assignments for both Time and Fortune. Stackpole's work won him a position alongside McAvoy on Life's original staff.

Although there were only four photographers listed in the masthead as official staff photographers, a fifth photographer was working for Life when the first issue was published in 1936. Carl Mydans, who had been a photographer for the Boston Globe and the Boston Herald, left the Historical Section of the FSA to work for Life. Like Stackpole and McAvoy, Mydans was an enthusiastic user of the miniature cameras and freelanced photographs for Longwell at Time. Before joining the FSA in 1935, Mydans had sold photographs to Longwell, and Longwell had followed Mydans' work for the FSA. In 1936, Longwell persuaded him to join the staff of Life, thus adding another cameraman who was experienced in and enthusiastic about 35mm photography.

During the Depression, Americans were becoming more interested in seeing photographs, and shrewd men like Henry Luce were aware of that fact. Photography had required a period of gestation, or as Robert Doherty said, "...a period of time to learn to manipulate this new tool to its full advantage; the thirties saw it mature."¹²

A new picture magazine was the subject of frequent discussions in publishing circles during the Depression. Photographs in tabloid newspapers had become commonplace and Sunday rotogravure sections featuring still photographs were popular. As early as 1925, the Cowles family, publishers of the Des Moines Register and Tribune, had hired Dr. George Gallup to conduct a readership survey to determine what interested them most. Gallup's report concluded

that "most persons prefer looking at pictures to reading type, and also that they like related pictures."¹³ The Register and Tribune then tested these findings by publishing related photographs in the newspaper's Sunday rotogravure section, resulting in a 50 percent increase in circulation. The Cowles decided to market their photographers' picture stories, and soon twenty-six of America's largest daily newspapers were publishing these photo-essays.¹⁴ The success of the rotogravure section encouraged the Cowles to consider a picture magazine, but it was not until February 1937 that they came out with the first issue of Look. Just why it took so long for the Cowles to start Look is not clear.

In 1933 Luce's Time was directly challenged by a new magazine called Newsweek, which advertised itself as the "illustrated news magazine." Within just a few years, this conscious imitator of Time was recognized as a threat to the older magazine, as indicated in this 1936 office memorandum from Longwell to his assistant Ralph Ingersoll about his hope that staff photographers could be added to Time:

Of course Luce will say—now don't tell me we need cameramen (Luce 1934-5 ad infinitum). Right he was—you could have simply picked the best of the (wire) services, done with that, a couple of years ago, i.e. use pictures as Time used newspaper clips. But Newsweek outflanked us on that trip. They frankly print 1/3 pictures, 2/3 text. So we must use the services plus our own imagination. How did Newsweek outflank us? Couldn't get the space in the magazine here. Open the book up, and, pop, in went more copy. If the copy looks light, what happens?—they panicly cut down the size of the book. I'm not criticizing, merely pointing out that Time's editors, charming, affable, and exceedingly intelligent, faced with a picture other than a face become insufferable stuffed shirts, start talking about Time's traditions. What the hell is Time doing with traditions?¹⁵

Longwell's continued interest in the use of photographs is evident in this memo, as well as the threat which Newsweek presented to Time Inc.

The time was ripe for a picture magazine. According to historian Robert Elson:

Everyone, Luce recalled, seemed to be interested in publishing a picture magazine. "You would go to '21' and places like that," he said, "and people would buttonhole you and tell you what a natural it was. When you asked what you would put in such a magazine or how it should be made up, they could not tell you."¹⁶

Luce, however, did have access to experienced editors who did know how a picture magazine should be made up and what should be put in this new type of publication. The surge of interest in an American picture magazine happened to coincide with Hitler's rise to power in Germany, when many of the Europeans who had worked on the German picture magazines sought refuge in the United States. This ready supply of trained, experienced, and talented men and women could not have come at a more opportune time for Luce; the emigrés were anxiously seeking employment and security in the United States at a time when they were needed most by American publishers such as Luce.

Kurt Korff's Influence

During the time Longwell was working to improve Time's use of photographs, a letter was received from former editor of the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, Kurt Korff, along with a letter of introduction from Dr. Rosie Graefenberg of the House of Ullstein in Germany. In her letter, dated October 20, 1934, Graefenberg told Luce that Korff was "a unique expert for printing matters and for the use of photos in magazines....It will be interesting for you to have a talk with Mr. Korff, and perhaps you can give him advice how to use his knowledge and experience for the good of the reading world."¹⁷ The letter which Korff wrote to Luce two months later to accompany Graefenberg's letter asked if a meeting could be arranged among Luce, Kurt Safranski, and himself.

A few days later Luce wrote to Korff that an appointment had been set for December 8 which Longwell would attend as well.¹⁸ This first meeting was the beginning of an important relationship between Korff and Time Inc.; Korff was hired as a consultant, joining with Longwell and Joseph Thorndike to form the nucleus of a new Experimental Department, leading to the first issue of Life. Only a few sources (Elson, Wainwright, Cort, Spencer)¹⁹ have even acknowledged the contributions Korff made as a member of that team. Published sources have not thoroughly documented the role Korff played on the pre-publication staff, but there is important evidence in the Time Inc. Archive in New York City that suggests that Korff had a great deal of input in the Experimental Department on three crucial levels: recommendations concerning what audience Life should target its material for; which photographers should be hired to work for Life; and how the photographs should be obtained and laid out.

Historian Robert T. Elson had only a few words to say about Korff in the authorized history of Luce's publishing empire, Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise, 1923-1941. In that book, Elson said:

Longwell also had as his consultant one of the foremost European picture editors, Kurt Korff, the former editor of the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung, who had recently been driven from Germany because he was a Jew. Longwell credited Korff with teaching him how to read pictures, how to look for "a little more of something" that sets the great photograph apart.²⁰

Unfortunately, these few words and the brief remarks by the other three authors do not reveal all of the contributions Korff made during the year he served as a consultant to Time Inc. Although Korff left his position as consultant feeling as though he had been exploited by the company,²¹ his brief tenure on the Experimental Department proved to have a considerable impact on the development of America's first picture magazine.

One possible reason for the lack of historical attention to Korff is the fact that Luce and his staff gave very little public notice to the second Experimental Department and took extra precautions to hide the fact that Korff was a consultant at Time Inc. In a letter to Korff dated March 1935, Longwell asked Korff to keep their arrangement and upcoming "experiments" a secret, "because I would rather not have any conversation about it around New York."²² Luce, Longwell, Thorndike, and Ingersoll were the only major figures at Time Inc. who knew of the work Korff was doing with the Experimental Department, except for Mary Fraser, the head of the research office. The secretive nature of Korff's consultant position is obvious in a memo written by Fraser to Longwell about the work she had done with Korff during August 1935:

He has been a god-send to me, and whipped out a swell layout for the State Fair in about ten minutes—[John Shaw] Billings came barging into your office, where I had hidden him [Korff], and he [Billings] saw him, but then forgot (I don't know how!) to ask me who he was, so he's still a secret.

I'm completely sold on Korff—the whole thing ought to be a swell success. I'm afraid I haven't been able to give him much help, but our weekly 'conferences' have been swell fun for me—nice, calm, philosophical oasis in the complete madhouse this summer turned out to be.²³

Exactly why or for how long Longwell and Luce kept Korff under wraps is not explained in the office memoranda and correspondence. However, the secrecy surrounding Korff's employment is consistent with the confidential nature of the new Experimental Department. The time was ripe in the mid-1930s for an American picture magazine, and Luce was determined to be the first in the country to publish one. As Billings noted in his daily diary: "Luce was all for the picture magazine. He's got it in his blood bad."²⁴ Luce apparently hoped that by keeping the Experimental Department low-key,

other publishers would not learn of his plans and beat him to the newsstands. The race was close: Look was published just two months after the first issue of Life.

Other steps were taken by Luce to ensure the confidentiality of his newest publishing venture: the new Life presses were guarded by Time Inc. company police until the first issue was at the newsstands.²⁵ The presses were so valuable to Luce because of a new technique perfected by the printers of Time, the Donnelley Co. of Chicago. Donnelley was unable to refine until the spring of 1936 a printing technology allowing photographs to be printed on "machine coated" paper that was thick and cheap, using faster drying inks and a "heatset printing" process which used extremely high temperatures to dry the ink as it hit the page.²⁶ This astonishing break-through in printing technology was the process Luce had been waiting for.

Although Korff was no longer employed at Time Inc. when the first issue of Life came off these new presses in November 1936, a great number of his suggestions were incorporated into that new picture magazine. In a 1935 document entitled "Essential Outline for a New Illustrated Magazine," Korff had made the following recommendations:

- give the magazine a short title;
- run only one "very good, thrilling, artistic picture or illustrated article" per issue if quality material cannot be obtained;
- feature only one photo essay/article on a particular issue or theme per issue;
- spend as much money as necessary to get good material because "rumors spread quickly that you pay the best;"
- publish controversial material as long as it is honest;
- obtain exclusive rights to photographs whenever possible;

—assign articles on art, theatre, literature, and animal life because of their wide appeal;

—and publish pictures about an upcoming event to arouse interest, followed by exclusive pictures of the event immediately afterward.²⁷

In a subsequent memo, Korff summarized his hope for the new magazine in this way: "The whole magazine should be like a Weekly U.S.A. Camera Book, intelligent like Time, witty like The New Yorker. I think it's modern and worth a dime when printed on good stock."²⁸

A major contribution Korff made to the new Life concerned who should be hired as staff photographers. In the spring of 1935, prior to joining the Experimental Department officially, Korff took a trip back to Europe, and Longwell asked Korff to locate photographers and sources of photographs for their new experiments. While in Europe, Korff received a letter from Longwell saying that two sets of photographs from Dr. Erich Salomon had been received, but they were too late to be used in Time. Longwell asked Korff to "tell him [Salomon] something of our plans and how very anxious we are to have him work along with us."²⁹

Korff's response to Longwell recommended Alfred Eisenstaedt be considered for the job because, as Korff said, Eisenstaedt is "one of the best photo-reporters I know."³⁰ Korff also recommended that Longwell consider using Miss Lotte Errell in addition to Salomon. Photographs by Salomon did appear in several 1932 issues of Fortune, but he could not be persuaded to move permanently to the United States.³¹

During his appointment as a consultant at Time Inc., Korff made other recommendations concerning who to hire and what qualities to look for in a photojournalist. In a memorandum to Longwell from June 1936, Korff recommended several other European photographers but they were not hired by Luce. Once

again, Korff promoted Eisenstaedt, saying that Eisenstaedt should do excellent work when thoroughly informed of what it is he should photograph.³² In this same memo, Korff strongly recommended Martin Munkacsi as the "best man for camera reporting...because he has the greatest travel experience, the best cameras and because he is a brilliant technician, a brilliant journalist (in Hungarian language), changing his work any time to the task before him."³³ Although a few of Munkacsi's photographs were published in the early editions of Life,³⁴ he was never hired as a staff photographer or placed under contract by Luce. It is not clear why Luce and other American publishers overlooked Munkacsi's strong credentials as a photojournalist in favor of his abilities as a fashion photographer.

One American photographer—Peter Stackpole—was considered by Korff to be worth consideration for a position on the new Life, but Korff generally found American photographers to be lacking when compared with the more experienced European photographers. In this same 1936 memo to Longwell, Korff explained his position:

American photo reporters, as could be seen at the interesting exhibitions and by their latest work in the newspapers, are doing excellent work, but their best shots are mostly taken by chance. In doing serial shots (photo essays) covering a certain event, they are not so good as European-trained camera reporters. It seems to me that the work for a magazine is different from the photo reporting for daily papers. A magazine needs more consecutive shots reporting the whole event and all the doing connected with it. Few of the American camera men are trained to do this work...they are maybe lacking the opportunity—not so well trained at camera work, serials for magazines. There are, of course, a lot of others who are worth trying out....Many are with the FORTUNE staff, but I have the feeling that they are specialists—not used to all around reporting work.³⁵

Korff was concerned that American photographers had received most of

their training on newspapers rather than magazines, since there were few American magazines specializing in the use of photographs. Most American publications at that time were using single images or loosely grouping single images as a picture page. Korff, however, knew that the European-trained photographers were capable of photographing the unfolding of events as they happened or could explore the many facets of a personality because he had worked with so many of them at the BIZ. He had watched the photo essay evolve in the German picture magazines since the 1920s and was confident that such innovative shooting could be continued by those photographers in the United States.

Apparently Luce and Longwell valued Korff's opinions, because Eisenstaedt was hired on the pre-publication staff in 1936, along with Stackpole. Longwell added McAvoy to the pre-publication staff, and Luce transferred Margaret Bourke-White from the staff of Fortune, rounding out what was to become the original staff of photographers for the new Life. According to Paul Deutschman's "The First Ten Years of Life,"³⁶ Korff also recommended that Herbert Gehr, Fritz Henle, and Eric Schaal be employed at Life, which eventually came to pass as well.

Korff's influence was not limited to personnel matters. Longwell acknowledged that Korff taught him how to "read" pictures, stressing the elements that separated great photographs from good photographs. Korff passed along to Longwell his experiences of pulling together and laying out a photo essay by working on picture spreads in Time.³⁷ According to Longwell, "The real gist of our picture magazine was worked out journalistically in the pages of Time."³⁸ One of the first criticisms Korff offered Longwell on Time's picture display was aimed at McAvoy's candid photographs of President Roosevelt. The layout consisted of a large lead photograph on the first page, accompanied

by several photographs of text explaining how McAvoy had gotten these unique photographs, and then the next two pages made up a double-page spread with two rows of photographs of equal size going from left to right as a sequence. Although Korff thought McAvoy's photographs were "excellent work," he considered the layout to be in need of help because it had "a bit of [an] advertising look."³⁹

A few months later, McAvoy's work was the subject of another Korff memo. This time Korff asked Longwell if McAvoy could be permitted to do his own darkroom work that McAvoy would improve his technical skills. Korff believed that the photographer would "recognize what is right and wrong" with his photographs if he were allowed to develop, select, print, and edit his own work.⁴⁰ Although I am not certain how photographers for Time carried out their duties, Life photographers did not do their own darkroom work; they merely shot the film and sent it back to the company darkroom to be processed, selected from, and printed.

Korff wrote yet another memo about McAvoy, this time addressing his remarks directly to the photographer. Although it seems unusual for Korff to be so direct, his note appears to be well intentioned:

As a matter of fact your shots are often very bad for reproduction. There is too little in the faces, they appear as a plain white spot with black points—the eyes, and a line—the mouth. Either the enlargement is too considerable or the flashlight [flashbulb?] was too near to the lens.** The use of the flashlight mostly gives bad results for the reproduction. Please look over the included prints. The faces are not plain, many details can be recognized, and even in the eyes is an expression. (See first row). These are the pictures we want.

**Or there is some other trouble—maybe the prints aren't all right.⁴¹

It is unfortunate that there is no indication in the archive material as to which photographs or photo essay Korff is referring to, or why printing for reproduction became an issue at this time. An unusual aspect of these two memos is that Korff's office memoranda (in the Time Inc. Archive) is written to those in high editorial posts, such as Luce or Longwell, not to the photographers. Korff's contact with the photographers on the pre-publication staff is not documented.

In addition to his other advice, Korff produced a "dummy" or mockup of an illustrated magazine to serve as an example of how single photographs and photo essays could be put together into an effective "package." Korff had made a dummy for William Randolph Hearst when he moved to New York from Europe at the urging of Safranski. In fact, it was this dummy that Korff showed Luce in the spring of 1935 that helped persuade Luce to bring Korff on as a consultant to the pre-publication staff. Luce even considered having Korff work as a special picture adviser to his three magazines: Fortune, Time and Architectural Forum. The following is an excerpt from Luce's memo to Longwell:

He [Korff] showed me the dummy he made for Hearst. It's almost perfect. Better than anything I've seen. He wants to play with us. Hearst is ready to go with it, but Berlin dallied. Korff can't stand Hearst's journalism. Likes us. I've taken a liking to the old man. I want to take him on—\$100 a week during the summer. Have him get out in the country—work at home—come in to see me once a week or so—make us three dummies—at different price levels....In Sept. we take a look. Even if it all washes up—I think Korff might very well make a place for himself as special picture adviser for all three of this place's books.⁴²

The dummy which Korff produced for Luce and found its way into the Time Inc. Archive was dated January 1, 1936 and was priced at twenty cents.

This dummy made Korff's earlier recommendations more concrete and visual: he suggested topics which the proposed Life should cover, and how the photographs could be edited to effectively communicate with an audience. Korff's dummy contained several photographs by Munkacsi, an accomplished European photographer whom Korff had recommended to Longwell for a position on the new magazine. The contents also included a photo essay on Walt Disney, a double-page spread on police matrons, one on fashions, and another on the fun of flying. This mix of topics was prophetic of the content later found in Life.

There was also a section entitled "Resemblance," similar to an idea Stefan Lorant later used in the English picture magazine Lilliput. By pairing two ordinary photographs, such as a statue of an angel at the Cathedral of Reims in France and a shot of a French woman, Korff was able to draw visual parallels between two things not normally juxtaposed. This unique and often times humorous pairing of photographs, however, was not used in Life.

The closing page of the dummy is filled margin to margin with six photographs—all very tightly cropped close-ups of a man's face. Although no photographer is given credit for the work, it is possible that they were taken by Munkacsi. Variation in facial expressions was a special interest of Munkacsi, and these sequential shots were first published (no photographer's name here either) in the June 22, 1930 issue of the BIZ. The dummy which Kurt Safranski produced for Hearst and his associates in 1934 features the same sequential portraits, plus three more shots from the same series, for the closing page of his dummy.⁴³ The special quality of these six (or nine in the case of Safranski's dummy) photographs is their simplicity. Korff recognized that a photograph need not be full of neck-breaking

action or taken in exotic places or unusual in terms of camera angle. These single "head shots" were of a man listening to someone sing; the camera captured the changes in his emotions, as they were expressed in his facial expressions.

How the magazine should obtain good photographs in addition to those created by the staff photographers was another area Korff gave a considerable amount of advice on. In a long memorandum dated April 14, 1936 to Ingersoll, Korff described the archives and picture files kept by the BIZ in Germany. More important, Korff explained how the BIZ utilized picture agencies such as Wide World and Ernest Mayer's Mauritius. Agencies received a small fee immediately if the photograph was made a part of the magazine's archive; otherwise, they were paid after the photograph was reproduced. In a few cases, as with Wide World, a contract with BIZ guaranteed the agency 2,000 marks a month for the right to see all photographs before any of the other picture magazines.⁴⁴ This policy was one which Luce later adopted with Black Star when Life began.

Korff stated that his practice was to purchase complete sets of photographs, even when he only wanted to use the best ones of the series: he didn't want other magazines to have access to the same story material. Permission to sell a series of photographs to another magazine could not be secured by the agency until six weeks had passed. Luce was well known for doing the same thing at Life; in fact, Luce went so far as to buy photographs he never published in Life, just so the competition could not run them.⁴⁵

Because BIZ used only two or three staff photographers who worked exclusively for the magazine, freelance material was especially important. To encourage the best freelancers to submit their best work, the BIZ paid very well and gave the material good "play." Photographers were eager to be

published in the BIZ, and "becoming famous is part of the fee" they received, according to Korff.⁴⁶ The same was to be true of Life; Luce spared no expense and the magazine became legendary for its generous expense accounts and unlimited travel funds. Having your photographs published in Life during the 1940s and 1950s was a goal worth striving for. At Life, photographers were a privileged group, which was in keeping with Korff's attitude toward photographers: "...the best star photographers provide a magazine with the best pictures. They are like the best writers for a story magazine."⁴⁷

Korff was a likeable man, according to all reports, but he was unable to give up his past and move on to a new publication. According to Spencer, Longwell thought that Korff "was unable to free himself from the Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung and the planners of Life had no desire to duplicate the German picture publication."⁴⁸ According to Mayer, Korff was upset that there were no plans to make him an editor on the new magazine's staff.⁴⁹ There is no clear documentation of why Korff's tenure at Time Inc. ended: the archive includes only Korff's letter of resignation, dated July 31, 1936; no other memos or letters indicate either that Korff was considering leaving his post to work for Hearst or was being pushed out against his will. His letter to Luce is reproduced in full below to retain its tone:

I have always been some sort of mascot to publishers.

I predict a big success. You really are going to create the long expected great American magazine. I am proud and very grateful to you that I could be with your organization one year and look at the cradle of the newborn.

I did not follow your advice in getting a long contract from Mr. Hearst. I didn't want a long contract, need no security...I will sign for only one year because I don't know if I will like it.

I am very sorry to leave you. The spirit of your organization is my spirit too. It was easy for me - although I had

to overcome the handicap of the foreign language - making friends and working in this milieu with my usual joy, having fun in everything.

Maybe I can help Mr. Hearst in cleaning his picture business a bit. That would be fine. If I am to work as an adviser in this country, it is better that I go to the poor - figuratively speaking - than to the rich, as you are.

I didn't ask for that. It worked out so successfully for me because the fame of your organization (Promotion book and so forth) brought me into the limelight. I am grateful to you for that. I am the only German who can really say: Heil Hitler!⁵⁰

Luce and Longwell's response to this letter is not documented because there is no material in the Archive for the four-month period following Korff's departure. Longwell's fondness for the departed Korff is evident in the following letter of November 1936, which was sent to Korff along with an early copy of the very first issue of Life. Longwell's letter included the following passage:

Naturally I am frightened at the results of the next few weeks - have made all hostages to FORTUNE in case of failure. I don't believe LIFE would ever have come into being if it hadn't been for you and Mr. Safranski coming to call on Mr. Luce that day. Certainly, credit for any of the virtues it has belong to you and your wise experience and youthful enthusiasm which you taught us here. And all of its faults are our own.

I wish you were here with us.⁵²
[emphasis by author]

The admiration which Longwell felt for Korff was exhibited again in a memo to Luce—this time in the last important piece of evidence from the Time Inc. Archive. This January 1937 memo, documents the fact that serious thought had been given to hiring back Korff. Parts of the memo are produced below:

He (Korff) is unhappy with Hearst, but there's no use in his coming back here now. That's all a 'might have been.'

My judgment is a little warped because I am so fond of Korff. He was so game—worked any hours at the most menial tasks, and liked us. Besides he said such wise things. An expression of his somehow summed up everything you were going to learn in the next six months—you know the feeling.

For instance, you are looking for the word to express LIFE's character. Korff came closest to it on the phone to me just after he's seen Vol. 1, No. 1. He said, 'Believe me, Mr. Luce has published the first picture magazine for adults. All the rest - Berliner Zeitung and all before - were for children.' That's the germ of your idea. You came next closest to it when you exploded in the layout room that LIFE was not a mass mag. (If LIFE goes to a million it a'n't mass. It's class!)

But about Korff. Some weeks ago Black Star (our best picture agency and a solid crowd who brought good European photography to this country) approached me on the idea that they take over Korff, that we pay him \$5,000 a year to be at our service in the capacity he was. For them he would develop photographers (which he's best at) who would eventually take over the bulk of our work. And because they could work for advertisers and other publications as well as for us, we, having first call on their work, could get our photographic staff work much more cheaply.⁵²

How Luce responded to this memo from Longwell is unknown, but Korff did not return to Time Inc. Instead, he stayed with the Hearst organization, leaving some time before December 1937. Korff died in New York City a month later after a six-week illness. He was 61 years old.⁵³

Conclusions

In the literature concerning the origins of Life, the influence the German picture magazines and its editors and photographers had on Henry Luce and his staff is overlooked. However, there is strong evidence in the Time Inc. Archive files indicating that the year Kurt Korff spent as a consultant to the company's newly reorganized Experimental Department was

extremely beneficial in the development of America's first picture magazine.

Korff is just one of the Europeans whose training and experience on the German picture magazines provided Time Inc. with a model to pattern its new venture after. Many of the suggestions Korff made concerning which photographers should be hired to work for Life, how the photographs should be obtained and laid out, and what audience the magazine should target its material for were followed by the publisher. Although Korff was not alone in influencing the form Life took in its early years—Longwell and Clare Boothe Luce played important roles as well—his contributions to the development of what came to be this country's greatest picture magazine has been sadly overlooked until now.

Notes and References

¹Robert T. Elson, Time Inc.: The Intimate History of a Publishing Enterprise, 1923-1941 (New York: Atheneum, 1968): 205.

²Ibid., p. 201.

³Otha Cleo Spencer, "Twenty Years of Life: A Story of Time Inc.'s Picture Magazine and Its Contributions to Photojournalism," an unpublished dissertation, University of Missouri, 1958.

⁴Paul Deutschmann, The First Ten Years, unpublished typewritten manuscript, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.

⁵Henry Luce, testimony in Corcoran vs. Time Inc. suit, 14 May 1941, Supreme Court of New York County, as quoted in Spencer, op. cit., p. 114.

⁶Clare Boothe Brokaw, memorandum to Conde Nast, 9 May 1931; used as evidence in Corcoran versus Time, Inc. suit, Supreme Court of New York County, cited in Spencer, Ibid., p. 134.

⁷Daniel Longwell, testimony in Corcoran versus Time Inc. suit, 14 May 1941, Supreme Court of New York County, cited in Spencer, Ibid.

⁸Elson, op. cit., p. 245.

⁹Daniel Longwell, "Statement About a Dummy." This is a letter to Time Inc. Archives telling about the dummy which was given to Luce on his Cuban honeymoon in 1936.

¹⁰Spencer, op. cit., p. 116. From an interview conducted with Longwell on 11 April 1957, at his home in Neosho, Missouri.

¹¹Elson, op. cit., p. 270.

¹²Robert Doherty, "Visual Literacy," University of Rochester Library Bulletin 27 (Winter 1973-74): 91.

¹³John Drewry, "A Picture-Language Magazine," Magazine World, November 1945, p. 19.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Daniel Longwell, office memorandum to Ralph Ingersoll, 14 January 1936, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.

¹⁶Elson, op. cit., p. 270.

¹⁷Dr. Rosie Graefenberg to Henry Luce, 20 October 1934, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.

¹⁸Reference is made to this meeting in a letter from Daniel Longwell to Kurt Korff, 2 February 1935, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.

Footnotes, continued

¹⁹See: Elson, op.cit., Loudon Wainwright, "Life Begins: The Birth of the Late, Great Picture Magazine," The Atlantic Monthly 241 (May 1978): 60-1; David Cort, The Sin of Henry Luce: An Anatomy of Journalism (Secaucus, N.J.: Lyle Stuart, Inc.; 1974): 47; and Spencer, op.cit., pp. 125-30.

²⁰Elson, op. cit.

²¹Ernest Mayer, interview held at his home in Riverdale, N.Y., 3 January 1979.

²²Daniel Longwell to Kurt Korff, 2 March 1935, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.

²³Mary Fraser, office memorandum to Daniel Longwell, Summer 1935.

²⁴Elson, op. cit., p. 270.

²⁵William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (London: Oxford University Press, 1973): 129.

²⁶Ibid. Also see Elson, op. cit., pp. 272-3, 233-4.

²⁷Kurt Korff, "Essential Outline for a New Illustrated Magazine," 1935, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.

²⁸Kurt Korff, office memorandum to Daniel Longwell, 10 June 1936, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.

²⁹Daniel Longwell, letter to Kurt Korff, 1 April 1935, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.

³⁰Kurt Korff, letter to Daniel Longwell, 18 April 1935, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.

³¹Salomon went with his wife and one of their two sons to Holland in 1933 in order to escape the Nazis; unfortunately, the Nazis located them there a decade later and sent Salomon and his family to Auschwitz, where they died in the gas chamber in 1944.

³²Kurt Korff, office memorandum to Daniel Longwell, 22 June 1936, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.

³³Ibid.

³⁴A memo from Longwell to Korff dated 7 May 1936 concerning an assignment on championship table tennis players resulted in a two-page spread of photographs by Martin Munkacsi in the 22 February 1937 issue of Life. Other examples of Munkacsi's work can be seen in 15 February 1937, pp. 36-7, and 1 March 1937, p. 46.

³⁵Daniel Longwell, memo to Kurt Korff, 7 May 1936, op. cit.

³⁶Deutschman, op. cit.

Footnotes, continued

- ³⁷ Longwell testimony, op. cit.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Kurt Korff, office memorandum to Daniel Longwell, 25 February 1935, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁴⁰ Kurt Korff, office memorandum to Daniel Longwell, 18 June 1935, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁴¹ Kurt Korff, office memorandum to Thomas McAvoy, 26 November 1935, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁴² Henry Luce, office memorandum to Daniel Longwell, 12 June 1935, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York. An archivist has written a notation on the memo, questioning whether Korff ever sent it to McAvoy.
- ⁴³ Kurt Safranski, dummy of a picture magazine, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁴⁴ Kurt Korff, lengthy office memorandum to Ralph Ingersoll, 13 April 1936, Time Inc. Archives, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁴⁵ Ernest Mayer, personal interview, 3 January and 13 May 1979, Riverdale, New York.
- ⁴⁶ Kurt Korff, lengthy office memorandum to Ralph Ingersoll, 13 April 1936, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Daniel Longwell, personal interview with Otha C. Spencer in Neosho, Missouri, 11 April 1957, as quoted in Spencer, "Twenty Years of Life," op. cit., pp. 129-30.
- ⁴⁹ Mayer, personal interview, 3 January 1979, op. cit.
- ⁵⁰ Kurt Korff, letter of resignation to Henry Luce, 31 July 1936, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁵¹ Daniel Longwell, letter to Kurt Korff, 19 November 1936, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁵² Daniel Longwell, office memorandum to Henry Luce, 5 January 1937, Time Inc. Archive, Time-Life Building, New York.
- ⁵³ "Kurt Korff Dies; Ex-German Editor," The New York Times, 31 January 1938, p. 19.